

Press Release

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Scotland must eliminate its wildlife crime

Scottish Environment has LINK today published a damning indictment of our failure to diminish or eliminate wildlife crime in Scotland – and the risk to our international reputation as a wildlife haven.

- **Natural Injustice – Paper 1 - *A Review of the enforcement of wildlife protection legislation in Scotland*** provides a forensic analysis of wildlife crime investigations and demonstrates the weaknesses Scotland has experienced in their detection, policing and prosecutions
- **Natural Injustice – Paper 2 – *Eliminating Wildlife Crime in Scotland*** follows on with a history of the crimes and the minorities committing them, and makes recommendations for dealing with this scourge.

The reports find:

- The extent of wildlife crime is vastly greater than suggested by the numbers of incidents, police investigations and prosecutions. What we see is just the tip of the iceberg.
- The political will to stamp out wildlife crime has been tempered, lacking or not exerted in an effective manner.
- There is a serious question as to whether the “partnership approach” adopted by the Scottish Government has failed.
- The example provided by the near elimination of egg-collecting has not been followed.
- Determined, intelligence-led, carefully targeted and community based policing is required, particularly in areas where a wall of silence seems to surround wildlife offences.
- The full panoply of sentences available to the courts should be used to deter wildlife criminals.
- The reports conclude with 20 recommendations for action to eliminate wildlife crime in Scotland.
- If these recommendations are followed, we believe we can virtually eliminate wildlife crime in Scotland and remove the stain it places on our international reputation.

Speaking on the publication of the papers, Eddie Palmer of Scottish Badgers, Convener of the LINK Wildlife Crime Task Force said:

“Wildlife crime arises from modern versions of old and outdated practices. Practices that were once acceptable are now considered cruel and criminal. This is especially so where the practices are obviously linked with economic interests. Behaviour in certain minority groups has lagged well behind these changes in our attitudes. It is time to change that behaviour and stamp out these crimes.”

Ian Thomson, Species Protection with RSPB Scotland added:

“Together, these papers should be a wake-up call for those involved in tackling wildlife crime. A law is only as good as its enforcement, and the comprehensive analysis contained in these papers shows that this is far from good enough here in Scotland.

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Editors' Notes

(1) The full papers are available on the LINK website <http://www.scotlink.org/>

(2) Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 30 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society. LINK is a Scottish Charity (SC000296) and a Scottish Company Limited by guarantee (SC250899). LINK is core funded by Membership Subscriptions and by grants from Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Government and Charitable Trusts.
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(3) List of recommendations in the Reports

Recommendation 1: Government and the wildlife NGOs should urgently discuss, agree and introduce measures to address under-recording; improve the standards for reporting; and introduce consistency across all areas of recording wildlife crime.

Recommendation 2: A three-tier classification system should be introduced for use by all agencies, assigning a widely agreed and accepted "confirmed", "probable" or "possible" category to each wildlife crime case, and grading information according to established police systems.

Recommendation 3: The Wildlife Crime Annual Reports should include, henceforth, an evaluation of the full extent of wildlife crime in Scotland.

Recommendation 4: Police Scotland should review the full complement of Wildlife Crime Liaison Officers (WCLOs) and Wildlife Crime Officers (WCOs) in terms of the basic number of whole-time-equivalent officers dedicated to this area of work. The basic complement dedicated to this area of work as its priority should be stated publicly, and used as a baseline – to be increased if it proves ineffective.

Recommendation 5: The complement of WCLOs and WCOs should be rigorously targeted by Police Scotland at the areas where wildlife crime is known to be greatest. Consideration might be given to the feasibility of establishing a national wildlife crime rapid response unit, to be comprised of multi-agency partners who could respond to reports of serious wildlife crime.

Recommendation 6: Police Scotland should agree a wildlife crime strategy, in consultation with the wildlife NGOs. The strategy should be intelligence led and carefully targeted at the areas of criminality.

Recommendation 7: Police Scotland should improve the basic wildlife crime training modules for all police cadets at the Scottish Police College and ensure compulsory, on-going training for all appointed WCLOs and WCOs.

Recommendation 8: The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) should urgently investigate why such a high percentage of cases fail to be prosecuted, and review arrangements for the allocation of its resources and training.

Recommendation 9: Follow-up investigations of wildlife crime by Police Scotland should be carefully monitored by COPFS and the expertise of partner organisations should be consistently and fully used. Results of investigations should be fed back to complainants.

Recommendation 10: The Wildlife Crime Annual Reports should include cumulative figures for prosecutions brought and the resultant rate of convictions.

Recommendation 11: Stiff sentences should be asked for by COPFS to allow for proper consideration of deterrent effect by the courts, and the consistency of sentencing should be carefully monitored by the appropriate authority.

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Recommendation 12: The Scottish Government should urgently institute confidence building measures and improved partnership working between Police Scotland, COPFS and the wildlife organisations, with clear instructions that the latter are not to be excluded from the process of investigation or prosecution, and their expertise and information sources should be properly and fully utilised in the fight against wildlife crime.

Recommendation 13: If the partnership approach is to continue, the Scottish Government should commission research to assess the true extent of the different types of wildlife crime in Scotland and remove any group tainted significantly by association with any area of wildlife crime from PAWS.

Recommendation 14: The Scottish Government should, immediately remove poaching from the PAWS remit and deal with it as a distinct and separate matter.

Recommendation 15: The Scottish Government should ensure that preventative measures are assessed rigorously - and targeted effectively.

Recommendation 16: The Scottish Government should consider how wildlife crime might become a material consideration within the land reform programme, and how it can be made into a major element within the statutory Land Use Strategy.

Recommendation 17: The Scottish Government should consider how any wildlife crime directly connected to land use on a specific piece of land might lead, consistently, to the withdrawal of subsidies associated with land ownership – and should publish, in its annual wildlife crime reports, a summary of Single Farm Payment and other penalties imposed as a result of wildlife crime.

Recommendation 18: The Scottish and UK Governments should consider how any wildlife crime directly connected to a land use on a specific piece of land might lead to the withdrawal of fiscal privileges associated with land ownership, as an additional sentence available to the courts.

Recommendation 19: The Scottish Government should commission research into codes or fears in individuals and communities around reporting wildlife crime in Scotland, and Police Scotland should consider trials for improving anonymised reporting for wildlife crime specifically.

Recommendation 20: Scottish Government and Parliament should consider undertaking a comprehensive review, and possibly a consolidation, of the laws relating to humans, wildlife and land use.